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May 7, 1996

The Honorable Reed Hundt, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, NW, Room 814
Washington, D.C. 20554

DOCKET FILE COPY ORIGINAL

RE: CC Docket #96-45

Dear Chairman Hundt:

I am President of the Ridgewood, New Jersey, Board of Education and I am writing to urge the Federal-State Joint Board and the Federal Communications Commission to adopt rules which will fully implement the universal service provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 for schools and libraries. I also support the comments of the National School Boards Association and others. Please include this letter in the formal record of the proceedings on CC Docket #96.

I urge the FCC to include a range of telecommunications services at discounts that will give Ridgewood more affordable access to the Internet as well as to interactive, voice, data and video capability necessary for distance learning. I also urge that these services be provided directly to the classroom and that the Commission address funding for both capital expenses and operating costs.

In Ridgewood, a suburban district, all nine schools have dial-up access to on-line services. This is costly in that we pay for a telephone line for each classroom. Also, the district has a T1 line to Rutgers for our Internet connection, at a cost of about \$9,000 annually.

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Some technologies the district would like to implement are the following:

- Distance learning with universities. The district is currently discussing the expansion of an existing relationship with a university to include this capability
- Network-based simulations with students from other school districts, virtual reality demonstrations, and explorations on the Internet.
- Connecting the school libraries to the county public library system for real-time searches and reservation of materials.
- Home access to school resources such as CD-ROM towers and Internet access.
- Highly secure home access to student records for parents.
- Full motion video-conferencing both locally, within the community, and across the Internet.
- Simulation/model development of complex physical, biological and economic systems.

The "affordability" barriers to technology usage in Ridgewood include:

- The most significant start-up cost that is a problem for the district is wiring the classrooms and offices of the district to local area networks and a wide area network.
- Time for training, an essential component, is very difficult to obtain within the constraints of the current school day and year. There is a hidden cost to always being at the middle or end of the technology cycle. Hardware that is affordable to schools is never cutting edge or even leading edge, so we always are purchasing at the middle or later portion of a life cycle.
- The cost of purchasing and maintaining current versions of software, as they are revised and upgraded, is a significant burden.

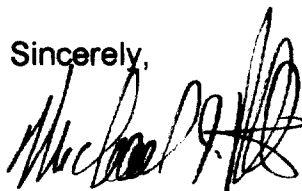
Some benefits of technology that we have seen in Ridgewood are:

- Use of the Internet has been enormously well received by both faculty members and students at Ridgewood High School.
- Use of technology like LegoDacta has been exciting for elementary and middle school students who have been actively engaged in hands-on problem solving.
- Student production of daily television programs at Benjamin Franklin Middle School has exposed students to career opportunities and informed the school and community about current events.
- Students in the Fine Arts and Graphics Arts programs have used the professional tools which they will encounter in the workplace of today, and have become adept in using those tools.

- Our high school newspaper is now composed for publication in much the same way that commercial publications are composed. Students, again, are gaining valuable skills for the workplace.
- The use of simulations has engaged students in complex problem-solving using "games" such as Sim-Town, Sim-Earth, and Sim-City.

In Ridgewood, we firmly believe that technology in the classroom is essential to ensuring that our children can succeed in a high-tech world marketplace. I urge the Commission to adopt rules that will help bring the broadest range of educational technology to our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael J. Porro', with a stylized, overlapping flourish at the end.

Michael J. Porro, President
Ridgewood Board of Education

MJP:ctd

cc: Board Members